

Growing Up As Lee Harvey Oswald's Daughters

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AUSTIN, Texas — Quietly and almost completely out of the public eye, the two children of Lee Harvey Oswald have grown up to lead the most average of American lives.

June, the older at 26, is a businesswoman married to a businessman, and they are expecting their first child - Oswald's first grandchild. Rachel, 25, is on the verge of receiving her degree from the University of Texas. She would like to become a nurse.

"I'm doing great," June said recently during a brief conversation outside her attractive home in a Dallas-Fort Worth suburb.

"I really think I am really boring and average," said Rachel during a longer talk on the patio of the small rented home in Austin that she shares with her boyfriend of two years.

Twenty-five years ago, Americans were touched by the sad pictures of two grieving young widows on opposite sides of an assassination - each with two children to raise. One was Jacqueline Kennedy, left to mother Caroline, 5, and John Jr., 3, alone.

The other was Marina Oswald, a 22-year-old, Soviet-born woman left virtually alone when Lee was killed by nightclub owner Jack Ruby two days after the Kennedy assassination. June was 21 months old at the time; Rachel was barely 5 weeks old.

For Oswald's two daughters, normalcy has come at a price. Twenty-five years after their father was charged with assassinating President John F. Kennedy in Dallas on Nov. 22, 1963, the Oswald daughters still seem wary of discussing their past outside their close circle of family and friends.

June says that her neighbors do not know her story. Rachel is reluctant to reveal her background to others at the restaurant where she works as a waitress while attending college - she finds that the information makes some, but not all, people "uncomfortable."

For Rachel, who looks a great deal like the man she calls "Lee," there has never been a time when she has forgotten who her biological father was.

"I can really say I think of it every day," the soft-spoken woman said recently as the night deepened around her Austin back yard. "I wake up and realize I'm Lee Harvey Oswald's kid. I don't even know why that happens."

Although Marina Oswald once feared that the American system of justice would call for her to be thrown into jail for her husband's crimes, Americans reacted with sympathy and generosity toward the Russian-speaking widow so far from home.

GIFTS, PROPOSALS

Donations and offers of gifts poured into the Oswald household. Several men proposed marriage. A writer for the Dallas Times Herald later estimated that Marina Oswald and her

daughters received between \$200,000 and \$300,000 in donations, in proceeds from the sale of some of Oswald's possessions and from Marina's biography, *Marina and Lee*.

A donation and letter sent in 1963 by the Rev. Douglas Bartlett of the Grant Avenue Presbyterian Church in Plainfield, N.J., was typical. The minister said that his church had collected \$5,885 as a symbol of "love over hate" and to help a family that would have to "live with the stigma of Oswald."

The media seemed to amplify that stigma. In the years immediately after the assassination, Marina's every move was photographed and written about. "Marina Sunburns on Texoma Visit," read one Dallas headline in 1964. There were several newspaper stories in 1965 when Marina and her second husband, Texan Kenneth Porter, came before a justice of the peace after a serious dispute. The justice, W. E. Richburg, lectured the couple to be mindful of the "image of Dallas."

Not all of the attention came against Marina's will. She reportedly received "substantial sums" for agreeing to interviews, according to the Dallas Times Herald. And she is said to have agreed to play herself in a movie that was never completed.

Recently, with the approach of the 25th anniversary of Kennedy's murder, the 47-year-old Marina has spoken out in the *Ladies Home Journal* and on a television show with columnist Jack Anderson. Although she once told the Warren Commission investigating Kennedy's assassination that she was convinced of Oswald's guilt, she now says that she believes there was a conspiracy - perhaps involving organized crime - behind JFK's death.

OUT OF VIEW

In spite of the incessant publicity surrounding their mother, Lee Harvey Oswald's two daughters have led lives remarkably out of the public view - coming into the limelight on only a few occasions and mainly on their own terms.

In 1982, the daughters successfully sued the *National Enquirer* over a sensational story that reported that they had been miserable and lonely teenagers, hounded by vengeful Americans who sent them hate letters and poisoned their dogs.

In fact, both girls were popular and active students at Rockwall High School in the small town of Rockwall, north of Dallas, where they were raised by Marina and their stepfather, Ken Porter.

June was the "joiner" in high school: Cheerleader, newspaper editor, honors student, creative-writing club, basketball. Rachel recalls that she was an award-winning drama student and for a while a member of the cheerleading squad - an honored position that, to the astonishment of her girlfriends, she quit.

"I thought it was ridiculous to massage these young boys' egos," Rachel now says.

With the exception of one coach who made June cry by making insinuations about her past, Rachel said, there was never much attention paid to their background while the two were in school.

"Maybe they were embarrassed to ask, but, you know, I don't think my generation is interested in it," she said.

Using money their mother set aside from donations, the girls enrolled at the University of Texas in the early 1980s. June wrote in *People* magazine in 1983 that she wanted to be a writer, and she left the university to attempt a degree at Harvard University.

Abandoning those efforts, she returned to the Dallas area to become an executive in a Dallas construction company. She is now working with her successful, businessman husband and living on a suburban Dallas-Fort Worth street lined with beautiful brick homes.

Rachel lives with her boyfriend on a poor street in Austin in a small rented house that, from the front, appears abandoned. The couple chose it mainly because it is "cheap," she says.

The two women are a study in contrasts. June is stylish, blond, with pale blue eyes and the attractive, square face of her mother. She is the more "polished" and "businesslike" of the two, Rachel says.

Rachel is thin and dark-haired, with Lee Harvey Oswald's mouth and his wide, penetrating eyes. "My mom always said I'm just like Lee," she recalled.

It is a comparison that has made her feel "nervous" at times - particularly after she read, in her mother's 1977 biography, about how Oswald began hitting and mistreating Marina as the two journeyed by boat from the Soviet Union to America in 1962, when defector Oswald became disenchanted with the Soviet system.

Before she read about the father she never knew, Rachel said, "I thought he must be kind of a nice person, because I'm a nice person." But now it bothers her that although "I could never do anything unlawful, he's the person I'm most like, and look who he is. And that's the last person I'd like to be like."

Extremely soft-spoken and self-deprecating, Rachel views herself as the unsuccessful Oswald daughter.

"I mean, God, I'm a waitress," she said. In the opinion of her family, she said, "I'm the one who's not married, whose future is bleak - I'm a girl who lives in a dump."

But Rachel is also proud that, after seven years in school, it is she who will earn the first college degree in her family. She is determined to study nursing so that she "will be able to help someone. . . . I could never be happy behind a desk, churning out numbers, living in a big beautiful house."

Although she is optimistic about her future, Lee Harvey Oswald's younger daughter has not always found it easy to live with her past.

"It was such a secretive thing growing up - not within the family, but (my mother would say), 'Rachel, don't tell anyone who you are. Deny it if you can. If they ask, say yes but then change the conversation.' "

Later, she met would-be suitors who would not ask her out again when they learned who her father was, and the last serious love of her life was embarrassed to be seen with her when November came around each year.

"I was blind in love," she says.

Her latest boyfriend is handsome, "very intelligent" and "his family accepts me. The thing I like the most is he's really not interested" in her past, she said.

As the 25th anniversary of her father's death approaches, said Rachel: "I wish I could say I was so sad, but it's not true. . . . I felt sorry (about Oswald's death at the hands of Jack Ruby) but for the man who that happened to. If it happened to Mr. Porter, it would crush me."

She may look like Lee Harvey Oswald and find her own life indelibly affected by this notorious man she never knew. But Ken Porter, Rachel said, "is the only man I think of as father. Lee I think of not really as my father. Just, really, this man."